

ISSUE 6. Statewide Leadership in Parks and Outdoor Recreation

Leadership and cooperation among participants in the park and outdoor recreation delivery system is fragmented and uncoordinated.

When park and recreation leaders, practitioners, enthusiasts and the public get together on park and recreation related issues, a common concern often expressed is the need for better coordination, communication and cooperation. Inconsistent statewide leadership and cooperation by and between park and outdoor recreation providers has long been recognized as an issue in California. The inconsistency in statewide leadership can result in missed opportunities in meeting public needs, poor communication between providers, ineffective planning and use of recreation resources and inadequate funding and support for facilities and programs. Effective and consistent leadership and cooperation among all providers is needed to advocate individual and societal benefits from parks and outdoor recreation and to coordinate actions to address statewide issues and opportunities.

At the statewide level, only the Vision, Insight, Planning (VIP) project of the California Park Recreation Society makes any significant attempt to coalesce service providers around a unified concept. Broadly stated, objectives of the VIP project include: creating a vision for the future of the park and recreation profession, identifying common issues and trends affecting the delivery of park and recreation services, identifying research needs, and creating tools and solutions necessary to maintain relevance. Many, though certainly not all, local park and recreation agencies in California have adopted the basic tenets of the VIP project and are putting them into practice. As of yet, neither state nor federal agencies have demonstrated much interest in the project.

The vision as to what leadership and cooperation means varies between providers. It might include consensus support for common goals, promoting benefits, educating elected officials and the public, technical assistance and training, coordinated acquisitions, collaboration to meet public need, protection of resource values, agreement on roles and responsibilities, cooperative marketing and planning or simply just staying in touch. Regardless of individual or agency concepts in the meaning, direction and guidance is needed to achieve common goals for the protection and promotion of recreation resource values and providing quality and diverse opportunities. There are many examples of successful efforts in accomplishing common goals and outcomes, but on a statewide basis, California does not have an effective or consistent mechanism for statewide leadership and cooperation.

Within a state as large, complex and diverse as California it is extremely difficult at best to develop a mechanism for effective leadership and cooperation, even with the intuitive knowledge that the rewards can be large. The commitment of time, energy and resources needed to maintain effective cooperative relationships can be significant.

Effective leadership has to be a coordinated effort that delivers a clear vision, focused actions and measurable objectives. Recreation providers and leaders throughout California have not been successful in developing a clear, universally accepted statewide vision and consistent message supportive of park and recreation programs and services. While the Vision Insight Planning (VIP) project sponsored by the California Park and Recreation Society is making headway, it is primarily designed to local park and recreation providers.

Californians are blessed with many park and outdoor recreation choices. There are opportunities for nearly any capability or skill level and in just about every outdoor setting imaginable. But these opportunities are provided by a host of federal, state, local, nonprofit and private agencies and organizations each with their own mission, management objects, regulations, and administrative practices, and, they each tend to operate within their own legal mandates and jurisdictional boundaries. This makes leadership and cooperation efforts among the providers extremely difficult without common ground. It is also a cause for public confusion. Interestingly, the public is less concerned about whom the provider is and more about the quality and availability of recreation opportunities. Even different departments within the same agency may not effectively coordinate among themselves. So with all the immediate challenges facing providers and the differences between them, it's not surprising that, in the absence of clear and compelling incentives, there is limited interest in cooperation on broad statewide issues affecting parks and recreation.

At one time, the California Department of Parks and Recreation, and the federal Bureau of Outdoor Recreation (later, the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service) provided a wide range of technical assistance in keeping with their statutory responsibilities to public and non-profit service-providers, particularly at the local level. Each agency, individually and in partnership, produced a number of technical papers and articles, developed guidebooks, hosted workshops, and participated in conferences on a wide array of issues of topical concern. Both were actively and broadly engaged in the park and recreation field. However, during tougher economic times, the federal program was absorbed into the National Park Service and the state program was dispersed to the point where neither was significantly engaged outside of their own park systems.

Statewide leadership for parks and recreation in California is an inherent responsibility of the California Department of Parks and Recreation. This leadership responsibility includes the encouragement of active and coordinated participation by all park and outdoor recreation providers in meeting statewide needs for recreation opportunities. It is with this responsibility in mind that the Department of Parks and Recreation will play a leadership role in statewide advocacy for parks and recreation. This role is supported by park and outdoor recreation leaders who have expressed the need for leadership through the development of a clear, compelling and unifying message in support of parks and outdoor recreation. In August of 2001, the Director of the California Department of Parks and Recreation convened a group of park professionals and community leaders from across the state to discuss leadership in the

context of creating a "parks movement" and to identify and address statewide issues affecting parks and recreation. A key theme of statewide leadership is to protect the gains made in recent years for future generations and to develop strong political and community support for parks and recreation, in good economic times and bad.

Key Points:

- A universally accepted statewide vision and consistent message supportive of park and recreation programs and services is lacking.
- There is little incentive for local park and recreation agencies to cooperate in responding to broader regional or statewide park and recreation issues.
- Linkages between statewide master planning goals (strategic or long-range planning goals) and those identified by providers (community master plans, city/county general plans, federal resource management plans, etc.) are lacking.
- Statewide research activities relative to park and recreation resources are not well coordinated and there is no central subject matter clearinghouse.
- Creative partnerships to meet future park and recreation needs or to extend the capability of providers are not effectively utilized.

Actions for Promoting Leadership and Cooperation:

1. The California Department of Parks and Recreation, in concert with the California Park and Recreation Society and the California Roundtable on Recreation, Parks and Tourism, should convene a Recreation Summit for the purpose of establishing:
 - A. A common vision of the role of the park and recreation profession.
 - B. An Outdoor Recreation Code of Ethics for Californians.
 - C. A set of guiding principles for the park and recreation profession.
 - D. Long-range goals for the profession through the establishment of training programs, technical support capabilities, and programs for recognizing achievement in the field.
 - E. A plan for attaining the long-range goals with a timetable for achieving them.
 - F. A mechanism for gaining support of community leaders outside of the recreation providers.

2. Federal, state and local providers should consider adopting relevant components of the California Park and Recreation Society's Vision Insight Planning (VIP) project and adapt it to their specific needs.
3. Benchmark existing models of professional organizations and use the model to clearly relay who we are and what we are about (e.g., American Federation of Teachers.)
4. Establish a statewide Leadership Academy designed to identify and mentor future leaders (both practitioners and citizen advocates.)
5. Beyond simply administering the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the National Park Service should recommit to the responsibility they assumed when the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service was absorbed into the Service to stimulate and provide technical assistance to park and recreation service providers.
6. Similarly, beyond simply administering local grants made available through bond acts and federal funding programs, the California Department of Parks and Recreation should re-establish its role in providing technical assistance to park and recreation service providers.
7. The California Roundtable of Recreation, Parks and Tourism should expand its membership to include greater representation from the private sector and other nontraditional partners such as the State Departments of Health and Human Services, user groups, and community-based organizations.
8. Park and recreation research initiatives in California should be posted to a central web site for dispersal to all interested parties.
9. State and Federal representative should meet with the California's Park and Recreation Society's Vision Insight Planning (VIP) team for better understanding and appreciation of the goals of VIP.
10. Implement active programs for the sharing of human resources through sabbaticals, staff swaps, internships and fellowships.